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NCDOT Rail Division

# The Rail Report



November 2015



## Great Smoky Mountains Railroad, NCDOT and Local Planning Officials Discuss Improvements and Economic Development Opportunities

In October, the Rail Planning Branch met with representatives of the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad (GSMR), the N.C. Board of Transportation, and Southwest Rural Planning Organization in Bryson City to review recent improvements to the line and discuss economic development opportunities. Great Smoky Mountains Railroad is a heritage railroad that primarily operates passenger excursions in scenic Jackson and Swain counties. NCDOT has partnered with GSMR to provide funding for improvements to the line including bridge and tunnel maintenance, switch and crosstie replacements, and crossing safety upgrades.



*Final 2014 crossties await installation*

At the time of the meeting, GSMR workers were installing the final 40 crossties for a track upgrade project funded through the Short Line Infrastructure Assistance Program in 2014. Freight Rail & Rail Crossing Safety (FRRCSI) program funds were recently used to provide matching funds for upgrades to the at-grade crossing surface on Governors Island Road.

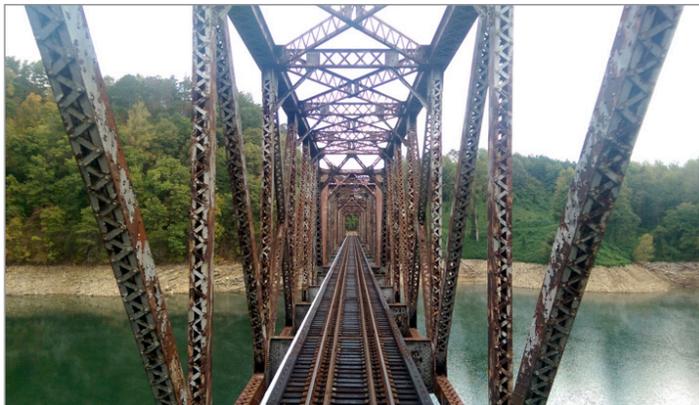


*Improved Governor's Island Rd. Crossing*



*Restoration of the Consolidation #1702 underway*

Until 2004, the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad operated the historic Consolidation #1702 steam engine on their excursions. Partnering with Swain County, GSMR is currently restoring the #1702 locomotive which was originally built in the 1940s. To accommodate its use, a turn table was recently constructed in Bryson City allowing the locomotive to be quickly turned around in preparation for the next journey. So far in 2015 GSMR has experienced a 20% increase in customers over the previous year and many future improvements have been identified to continue growing the business which is central to the tourism economy of the area. Great Smoky Mountains Railroad connects Bryson City with Asheville via the Blue Ridge Southern Railroad. Although there is no freight customer currently occupying the roughly 53 mile line between Dillsboro and Andrews, GSMR is equipped with 4 diesel locomotives and has experience handling freight. Sticks of rail and other track material for upcoming upgrades to sections of curved track will be imported by GSMR via rail. NCDOT continues to support GSMR in their efforts to preserve this historic corridor and return rail freight traffic to the region.



*Past projects have included funds to re-deck bridges*



*Bryson City Turntable*



## Short Line Infrastructure Assistance Program Call for Applications

The North Carolina Department of Transportation is soliciting applications for the 2016 Short Line Infrastructure Assistance Program (SIAP). This program provides state grants to assist short line railroads in the upgrade and modernization of their track and infrastructure.

Funded through the Freight Rail & Rail Crossing Safety Improvement Program (FRRCSI) authorized by the 2015 session of the North Carolina General Assembly, approximately \$1 million will be available for SIAP grants to short line railroads in Fiscal Year 2016. Grant awards are based on need and the project's economic and transportation benefits to North Carolina.

Eligible projects include track and structure rehabilitation, improvements, and new construction, as well as engineering inspection of railroad bridges. NCDOT is focusing this round of FRRCSI on bridge rehabilitation and related improvements. Grant funding may also be used to help defray the costs of preparing or obtaining Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing loans from the Federal Railroad Administration. Applications are due by 5:00pm on November 10, 2015.

In addition, the Rail Division has identified rail crossing safety projects statewide totaling approximately \$1.8 million for closures and surface improvements.

The FRRCSI program of projects for 2016 will be recommended to the Board of Transportation at their December 2015 meeting.



Mr. Drew Thomas, Rail Division Data Analysis & Inventory Manager, presents on the past and future of passenger rail service in Western North Carolina at the Mountain Gateway Museum's Historical Railroad Exhibit in Old Fort on September 19, 2015.

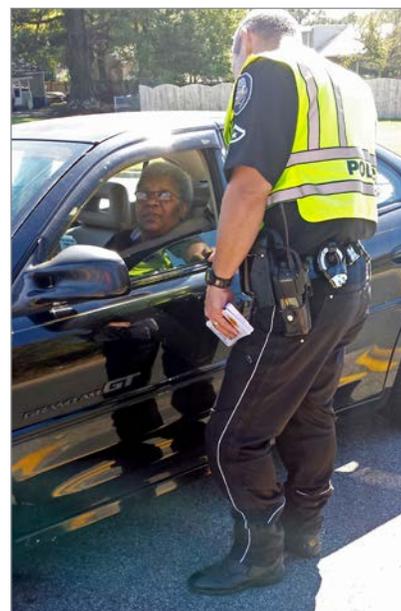
## NCDOT and Operation Lifesaver Teach Pedestrians and Motorists about Rail Safety at Crossing Blitz in Greensboro



The N.C. Department of Transportation's BeRailSafe education initiative has teamed up with rail safety advocacy group North Carolina Operation Lifesaver and the Greensboro Police Department to educate motorists and pedestrians about rail safety.

A Crossing Safety Blitz was held on Wednesday, Oct. 7, on Gillespie Street near the railroad tracks in downtown Greensboro. Representatives from all three organizations distributed safety tips to an estimated 1,000 pedestrians and motorists.

There have been more than 20 train-related fatalities and 88 injuries in North Carolina since January. The high number of injuries resulted in part from a train derailment caused by a train striking an oversized-load tractor trailer in Halifax County in March. Last year, there were 26 fatalities and 33 injuries in the state.



"The City of Greensboro is dedicating resources, time and energy to making a positive impact on the issue of rail trespassing," said N.C. Operation Lifesaver state coordinator Margaret Cannell. "It's an ongoing issue that I believe can be improved through the help of our Guilford County residents."

"The tragedy of one train-related death, whether it's from a person trespassing or a motor vehicle crash, has a significant impact on the railroad and the community it serves," said NCDOT Rail Division Director Paul Worley. "We are pleased to collaborate with partners like N.C. Operation Lifesaver and campus police departments to focus efforts towards prevention."



## Hop on Board the Piedmont to the Carolina Panthers Games

The *Piedmont* train schedule coincides with the remaining 1 p.m. home games this season:

**November 8, November 22, December 13, January 3**



North Carolina's Amtrak provides a convenient way to watch the Carolina Panthers play, without the hassle of driving and parking.

*Piedmont* 73 departs the Raleigh Amtrak station at 7 a.m. on game days with stops in Cary, Durham, Burlington, Greensboro, High Point, Salisbury and Kannapolis before pulling into the Charlotte Amtrak Station at 10:10 a.m. This arrival time leaves plenty of opportunity for grabbing a bite to eat or checking out the tailgating scene prior to the 1 p.m. game!

Visit [www.ncbytrain.org](http://www.ncbytrain.org) for details on transportation between the Charlotte Amtrak Station and the stadium and to book your ticket.

## Kick off the Holiday Season on North Carolina's Amtrak Santa Trains

Santa will make a special appearance on the mid-day *Piedmont* Trains on Saturday, December 5. NCDOT is offering a Santa Train Excursion from both the Raleigh and Charlotte stations.



### From Raleigh: Santa Train

Raleigh travels to Greensboro and back with a brief layover. To get on board, book a seat on the *Piedmont* #75 departing Raleigh at 11:45 a.m., and a return trip on the *Piedmont* #74 departing Greensboro at 1:34 p.m. and arrive back in Raleigh at 3:11 p.m.

**From Charlotte:** Santa Train Charlotte travels to High Point and back with a brief layover. To get on board, book a seat on the *Piedmont* #74 departing Charlotte at noon, and a return trip on the *Piedmont* #75 departing High Point at 1:34 p.m. and arrive back in Charlotte at 2:55p.m.

Visit [ncbytrain.org](http://ncbytrain.org) to purchase your tickets today, and enjoy visiting with Santa on board the trains.

## Ridership & Revenue on NC's Amtrak Service – \*August 2015 vs. 2014

	RIDERSHIP			REVENUE		
	2015	2014	% +/-	2015	2014	% +/-
Piedmont	12,948	14,867	-13%	\$256,499	\$294,911	-13%
Carolinian	27,845	29,823	-7%	\$1,897,949	\$2,435,761	-11%

\*August 2015 service modifications and annulments impacted four *Piedmont* trains due to PIP construction. On August 31, two trains, 74 and 75, were annulled. Also on August 31, 73 terminated in Salisbury with connecting bus service to Kannapolis and Charlotte, and 76 originated in Salisbury, with connecting bus service from Charlotte and Kannapolis. In 2014, there were no annulments in August. Looking ahead: Four to five service disruptions impacting midday trains are expected between September and December 2015. Gasoline prices in August, 2015 averaged \$2.53/gallon and \$3.48/gallon in August, 2014 (EIA Weekly Retail Gasoline for Lower Atlantic region).



## Out and About with North Carolina's Amtrak

NCDOT and Rail Staff have been out spreading the word about North Carolina's passenger train service.

- Bluegrass Wide Open, Raleigh
- NC State Fair
- The National Folk Festival, Greensboro
- Lexington Barbecue Festival
- Hamlet Seaboard Festival
- Lazy Daze Festival, Cary
- Cary Scavenger Hunt
- Queen City Battle of the Bands
- Caniac Carnival for Carolina Hurricanes
- Carolina Hurricanes Hockey games
- Neuse River Model Railroad Show
- UNC Charlotte Transportation Fair
- NC State Fan Zone
- Duke University Rec Fest
- Durham Bulls games
- Carolina Mudcats games
- Kannapolis Intimidators games
- Charlotte Knights games
- Greensboro Grasshoppers Playoff Game

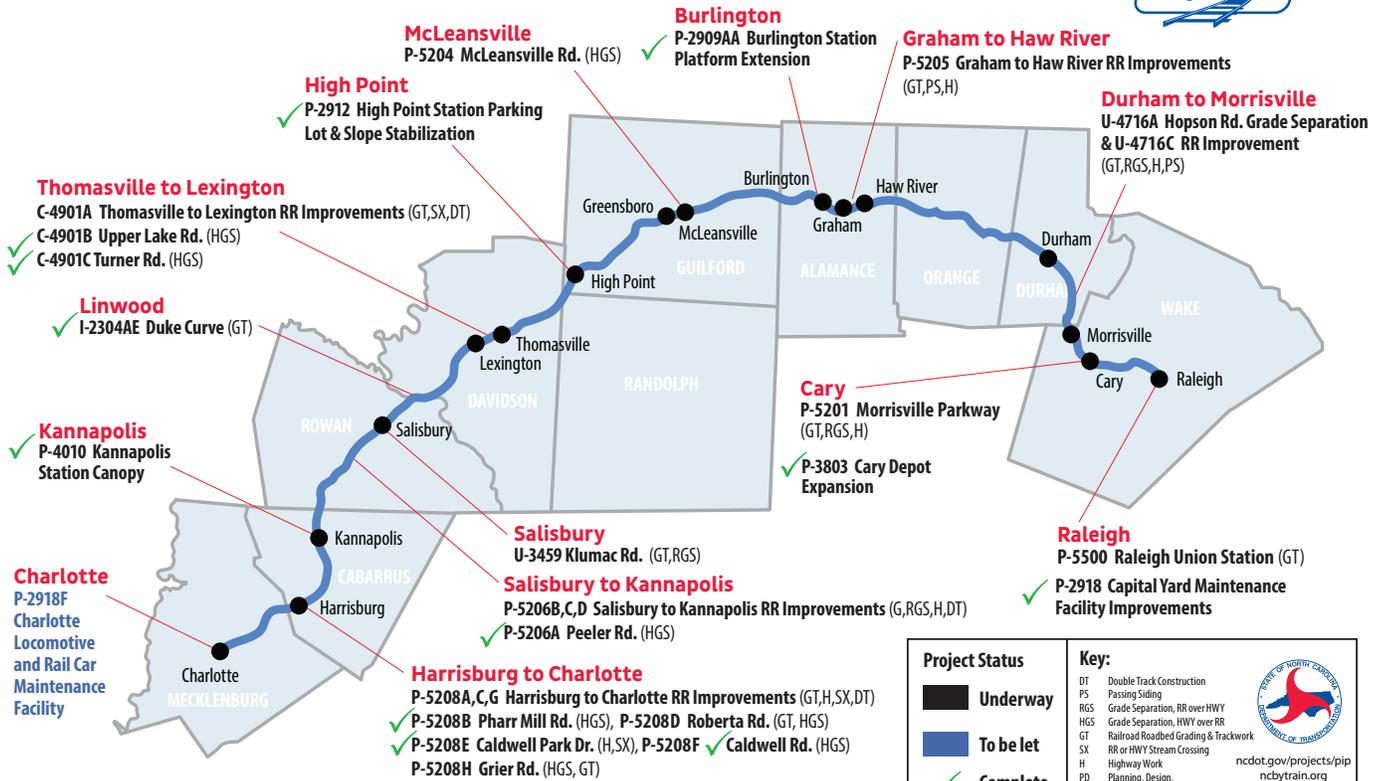


**1,117**

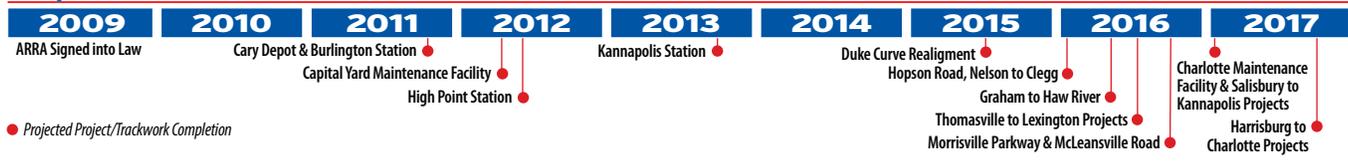


Hours Volunteered by N.C. Train Hosts in August, supporting North Carolina's Amtrak onboard trains and at events.

# Piedmont Improvement Program – October 2015 Status Report



## Project Schedule



## Spent to Date of \$520M (eff. 9/30/2015)

Component	Expenditure
PD&A/ROW	\$47,923,577
Equipment Procurement & Rebuild	\$26,933,812
Stations & Facilities	\$38,333,581
Track & Structures	\$ 206,948,046
CRISP	\$2,180,376
<b>Program Totals</b>	<b>\$322,319,392</b>

Five new contracts totaling \$22,992 were awarded in September.

## Commitments to Date of \$520M (eff. 9/30/2015)

Current Commitments		\$471M
Pending Commitments	Anticipated Date	\$42.7M
Charlotte Maintenance Facility Construction	3/16	\$33M
PIDS Construction	1/16	\$1.5M
PD&A	Through '16	\$8.2M
<b>Balance</b>		<b>\$6.3M</b>

## PIP Milestones



**Graham to Haw River** – Cut-in of approximately 3/4 of a mile of mainline track in two locations at Graham to Haw River siding. These cut-ins will allow completion of the siding off-line without future disruption to railroad operations until the siding goes into service.

**China Grove** – An approximately 1/3 mile curve improvement was cut-in on September 28, 2015 that increased the track speed from 65 mph to 79 mph. This curve is part of the 10-mile Reid to North Kannapolis double track project between Salisbury and Kannapolis.

# Piedmont Improvement Program and Congestion Mitigation Project Photos September 2015



Congestion Mitigation Project, CP Enfield complete



P-5201 Morrisville Parkway, bridge construction



U-4716 Nelson to Clegg Passing Siding, final phase grading



P-5205 Graham to Haw River Passing Siding, track construction



C-4901 Bowers to Lake, paving



U-3459 Klumac Road, final track construction

# Piedmont Improvement Program Project Photos

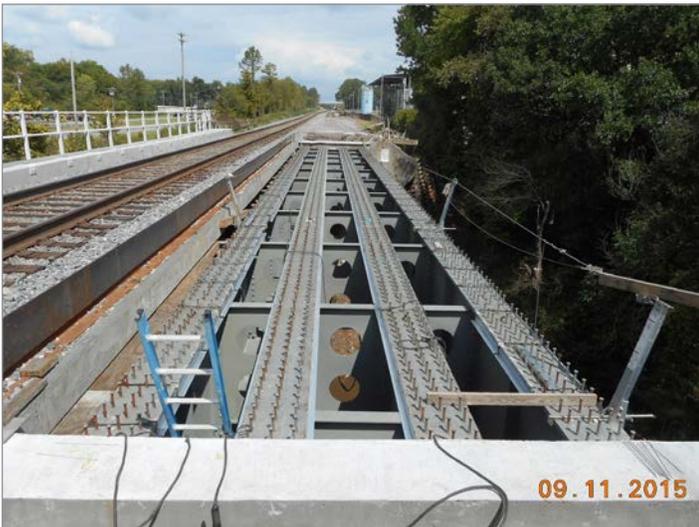
## September 2015



P-5206 Reid to North Kannapolis, Peeler Road Bridge open to traffic



P-5206 Reid to North Kannapolis



P-5208A Haydock to Junker, Rocky River Bridge Construction



P-5208 Haydock to Junker, Mallard Creek, railroad bridge construction at Mallard Creek



P-5208 Haydock to Junker, arch culvert construction



P-5500C Tryon Siding, track construction